

What happens when you give to the Y?

By Tom Van Deirse, CEO

Ever wonder if your donation really matters? What if you could track the impact of your gift - what kind of a story would you see?

As the directors of the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA board prepare again for their annual "Invest in Youth" fundraising campaign later this month, they are reminded of such a story that unfolded at the YMCA just a few months ago...

Joan M. (not her real name) broke down crying in our office. As a single parent who had lost her job almost a year ago, she faced a choice - find affordable quality child care for her two young children and try to reenter the work force, or stay at home with her children and rely on whatever charitable services she could for food and shelter.

She knew the latter was a downward spiral from which there was little chance of escape. If she had a job, she'd have the opportunity to create her own destiny, but there was a short term problem. Because she hadn't been working for some time, she did not qualify for DHS assistance with her child care. A large portion of what she would earn at a new job would go toward paying for child care. In the short term, without any help with these costs, it would actually make more financial sense for her to stay at home and not work at all, especially when the time and expense of searching for a new job are factored in. But Joan was thinking about long term. Joan was thinking about the day when she didn't need any help at all. Joan just needed a hand up, not a hand out.

Of the 57 children now enrolled at the Y Early Childhood Education Center, 11 of them come from families with stories similar to Joan's. The majority of our parents can afford to pay what it costs to run a high quality, curriculum-based, values-driven program. Many others qualify for DHS, and need no other local assistance. But for Joan and others like her, the additional financial assistance provided by a grant from the *Invest in Youth Appeal* makes all the difference.

Thanks to *Invest in Youth* and other sources of funding, Joan will be able to rest assured that her children are cared for in a safe, nurturing, educational environment while she works. Once established in the work force, she will again qualify for DHS assistance and no longer need help with funding. As her situation improves, Joan hopes to reach a point where she needs no government help, either.

And that's why Joan was crying in our office. She was shedding tears of joy and hope for the future of her family. None of that could have happened without help from the people who donate to *Invest in Youth*.

For more information about giving to *Invest in Youth* contact Dave Eitland, Y director of development, at 933-9622 or dave@gtbayymca.org. More information about all of the Ys programs can be found at www.gtbayymca.org.